

President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Issues

Following is a transcript of President Reagan's news conference last night in Washington, as recorded by The New York Times:

OPENING STATEMENT

Please be seated. I have a statement.

One hour ago, the body of a young American hero, Navy diver Robert Dean Stethem, was returned to his native soil in a coffin after being beaten and shot at point-blank range.

His murder and the fate of the other American hostages still being held in Beirut underscore an inescapable fact: the United States is tonight a nation being attacked by international terrorists who wantonly kill and who seize our innocent citizens as their prisoners.

In response to this situation, I am directing that the following steps be taken:

I have directed the Secretary of Transportation, in cooperation with the Secretary of State, to explore immediately an expansion of our armed sky marshal program about international flights of U.S. air carriers for better protection of passengers.

I have directed the Secretary of State to issue an immediate travel advisory for U.S. citizens traveling through the Athens International Airport, warning them of dangers.

This warning shall remain in effect until the Greek Government has approved the security situation there. And until it has demonstrated a willingness to comply with the provisions of the U.S.-Greek civil aviation agreement and the Tokyo, Montreal and Hague Conventions regarding prosecution and punishment of air pirates.

I've asked for a full explanation of the events surrounding the takeover of the aircraft in Athens. I have appealed through the Department of Transportation and the Federal Aviation Administration for all U.S. air carriers to review the wisdom of continuing any flights into Athens safe to the security situation there improves.

And further, I have asked Secretaries Shultz and Dolet to report to me on whether we should consider the service of foreign air carriers whose governments do not honor appropriate international conventions or provide adequate security at their airports.

I'm calling upon all allied and friendly governments to redouble their efforts to improve air security and take other measures to prevent the hijacking of aircraft.

I will also be asking them to take

steps to prevent travel to places where lawlessness is rampant and innocent passengers are in jeopardy.

And I'm urging that no American enter any Middle Eastern country that does not publicly stand in solidarity with itself from this atrocity and call for the immediate safe release of our citizens.

Let me further make it plain to the assassins in Beirut and their accomplices wherever they may be that America will never make concessions to terrorists. To do so would only invite more terrorism.

Now will we ask more pressure any other government to do so. Once we head down that path, there'll be no end to it. No end to the suffering of innocent people; no end to the bloody ransom all civilized nations must pay.

This act of terrorism is a stain on Lebanon and particularly on those Lebanese in whose name it has been done. Those in Lebanon who commit these acts damage their country and their cause, and we hold them accountable.

I call upon those holding our people to release them without condition. I urge the leaders of Lebanon, political and religious, to meet their responsibilities and to do all that is possible to end this crime now in the name of the God they worship.

And I call on other governments to speak out and use their influence as well.

This attack is an attack on all citizens of the world who seek to live in peace from the fear and scourge of terrorism.

My thoughts and prayers are, as are those of all Americans, with the prisoners now being held in Lebanon and with their families.

Let me close by saying the obvious: We're in the midst of a dangerous and volatile situation. Before taking your questions I must stress that speculation tonight over what steps we might or might not take in hypothetical circumstances could only lead terrorists to work harder.

Consequently, there are many questions to which I cannot respond. I think I have in this statement covered virtually all the points that I can safely discuss, and associated press that the first question.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Earlier Victims

Q. The world's attention is focused tonight on the victims of TWA Flight 87, but as you know, there have been other Americans who were kidnapped earlier and have spent three months to a year in captivity in Lebanon. Will you accept a solution to the current crisis in Beirut that leaves any Americans still in captivity either on the airplane or those kidnapped earlier?

A. I certainly include those in every conversation we have with regard to our people there. Whether they are being moved about and what we can do. But no, we haven't given up on them, and we include them in all of our conversations about the present hijack victims.

Q. Let me follow up. Can you tell us, sir, what happened to the policy of swift and effective retribution that you announced four and a half years ago to deal with international terrorism such as that that we've seen.

A. Well, when I was speaking about that I was talking about a situation where a government on the other side was involved so there was a direct source there for the evil. I would like to tell you, and I can't go farther than this in telling you, that the problem is who is perpetrating these deeds, and their accomplices are, where they are located because retaliation in some people's minds might entail striking a blow in a general direction and the result would be a terrorist act in itself and the killing and victimizing of innocent people. Now as far as I can go to tell you that we have used our utmost capacity in intelligence gathering to try and find them and these places that I'm talking about. And I can only say that we have gathered a considerable amount of evidence. I'm not going beyond that.

Impact of Policies

Q. Mr. President, do you think that any of the U.S. policies, past and present, have contributed to the rise of radicalism and anti-Americanism in the Middle East? And I'd like to follow up.

A. Helen, no. I don't believe that we have. Possibly, when we had a peace-keeping force there in connection with our allies and the countries that had forces in there, we realized that as they began to succeed in keeping some semblance of order in that turmoil, terrorism rose up to strike at all of us that were there in an effort to make our job impossible. And that's why the international force was there. We seem to be a target also, I'm quite sure, because of our friendship and support of Israel. So it's a very simple, but there is an anti-Americanism that is rampant there on the part of those who don't want to see the peace and who have consistently, over the years, committed terrorist acts against the Israelis.

Q. Mr. President, they wonder why

you don't lean on Israel a little bit since the U.S. said that the holding of the Shiite prisoners is against international law. That's our position. Is that what you're saying, or why don't you promote it?

A. Helen, because the linkage that we're making is that the Lebanese are the ones who are responsible for them and for us. There was no question but that they were going to release them. They already have been released. It has been decided to where such a movement would be in effect giving in to the terrorist. And that's what we're saying. The terrorists have to know that they can succeed and get what they want. It is to see if we can get them to stop kidnapping crimes in our country here, in which we know that if possible we cannot give in on them. And I hope that they have confidence in that.

And yet, as you can imagine, it is an extremely difficult, seemingly impossible task in that area with all the factors there to know where the terrorists are being moved about and what we can do. But no, we haven't given up on them, and we include them in all of our conversations about the present hijack victims.

Q. Let me follow up. Can you tell us, sir, what happened to the policy of swift and effective retribution that you announced four and a half years ago to deal with international terrorism such as that that we've seen.

A. Well, when I was speaking about that I was talking about a situation where a government on the other side was involved so there was a direct source there for the evil. I would like to tell you, and I can't go farther than this in telling you, that the problem is who is perpetrating these deeds, and their accomplices are, where they are located because retaliation in some people's minds might entail striking a blow in a general direction and the result would be a terrorist act in itself and the killing and victimizing of innocent people. Now as far as I can go to tell you that we have used our utmost capacity in intelligence gathering to try and find them and these places that I'm talking about. And I can only say that we have gathered a considerable amount of evidence. I'm not going beyond that.

Impact of Policies

Q. Mr. President, do you think that any of the U.S. policies, past and present, have contributed to the rise of radicalism and anti-Americanism in the Middle East? And I'd like to follow up.

A. Helen, no. I don't believe that we have. Possibly, when we had a peace-keeping force there in connection with our allies and the countries that had forces in there, we realized that as they began to succeed in keeping some semblance of order in that turmoil, terrorism rose up to strike at all of us that were there in an effort to make our job impossible. And that's why the international force was there. We seem to be a target also, I'm quite sure, because of our friendship and support of Israel. So it's a very simple, but there is an anti-Americanism that is rampant there on the part of those who don't want to see the peace and who have consistently, over the years, committed terrorist acts against the Israelis.

Q. Mr. President, they wonder why

Families of Hostages

Q. Mr. President, you spoke of frustration in your ability to deal with this. I spoke today to the wife of one of the hostages who has the very simple and straightforward question which I want to relay to you.

A. Well, now, he's in the position of supposedly having taken the hostages



President Reagan with Habib Bourguiba, President of Tunisia, at departure ceremonies for Mr. Bourguiba yesterday in Washington.

away from the hijackers. But to say he's because he holds a post, a so-called Cabinet post in the Government of Lebanon, that this now involves the Government of Lebanon, I think is to give the Government of Lebanon a cohesiveness it doesn't have. He is acting as an individual, and he's acting less as a minister in the Cabinet and acting in his own position as the head of the Amal, one of the factions of the Shiite Moslems there. He has his own militia and he has his own army, so it isn't that simple that you can say this is the Government of Lebanon.

Q. Can I follow up with — change the subject a bit. In the case of Mr. Bert, part of the problem, or part of the solution, and is he the only solution to this problem?

A. Now you're getting into the area of questions that I can't answer on this. But he could be the solution.

Q. Mr. President, so far this evening you've given us a rather sober assessment of what's going on in Lebanon. What is your own estimate as to how long this crisis may go on?

A. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. You're asking one of those questions that I can't answer. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

ances from them that they would release those prisoners if we got the hostages back?

A. We've not dealt with them on that. As I say, we have not interfered in any way with them in what their doing.

With regard to the international law, it's my understanding that the taking them across a border from their own country and into another country is a violation of the Geneva accords in that —

Q. I'm sorry. I could follow up, sir, has the International Red Cross been dealing with them for us on that issue? Dealing with the Israelis on that issue?

A. Again, we're getting into areas that I can't talk about. I covered all I can mainly talk about. I can't resist because I know you've probably got to get that red coat back in the morning.

Q. No, no. That belongs to WWDB in Philadelphia. More than 500 American flyers were rescued by General Mikhailovitch of Yugoslavia in 1944, and they want to erect a memorial on Federal property which the Senate approved twice and Mr. Derwinski supported repeatedly while President Truman gave the General the Legion of Merit.

Why, Mr. President, since it's very important to rescue Americans, are you allowing your State Department to stop this in its tracks?

A. I have to tell you, Lester, that this is the first that I've heard about it, and so you've given me a question to ask when we have tonight to find out about that.

I salute you.

A. All right. Let me. All right.

Q. Mr. President, since Nabih Berri has said — has joined the terrorists in their call for us to release the Shiite prisoners — is he not now part of their effort?

A. Again, this is too delicate for me to comment or give an answer to that question. I'm just going to do it.

Q. I may follow up. He said today that if the United States does not ask Israel to release the Shiite prisoners that he would give the hostages back to the terrorists. In that case would you hold him responsible?

A. Yes, I would. No. Here you, yes?

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

New Plan for MX

Q. Back to the MX, Mr. President. Do you have a new basing plan, because that was the condition, wasn't it, on the Senate cap that they could go above 50 if you had a new basing plan? Mr. Weinberger indicated that you do want more MX.

A. One thing right now, we do know from the research that we've done and the experimenting that we've done, we can vastly harden the extent that we think that it would take a very direct hit to do away with them. We're eliminating those missiles.

Hein, I think.

Q. [Inaudible]

A. Do you watch what's out there?

Q. Mr. President, you've been spending a lot of time monitoring the situation in Beirut on the hijacking. I was wondering how much time are you devoting to domestic issues during your day, particularly the tax effort on the Hill.

A. That's one thing I have to tell you: you can't just yourself at this tragedy, great as it is. I don't think that I neglect it in any way, because there is a limit to what you can do what can be reported and the times in between. Yes, we're very serious about both the budget, and tomorrow morning I will be making another appearance in connection with the tax reform.

Q. As a follow-up, sir, efforts are under way to enact a tax increase, either in tandem with the tax reform separately. Are you —

A. A tax increase? I don't have to spend any time at all on that. No, because there just isn't gonna be none. Let me go away into the back here.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.

Q. I don't know. I just can't say. I don't know. I just can't say.